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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social studies educators have given serious attention to the apparent crisis of citizenship and the improvement of civic education in the United States. Insufficient attention, however, has been given to the place of leadership in civic education. Yet, youth leadership is big business in the United States. Each year, over half a million high school students, along with a smaller but growing number of middle school students, participate in programs intended to encourage civic leadership and to develop leadership skills. This digest addresses four questions concerning leadership: How is leadership related to citizenship? What are the essential elements of leadership? What are the competencies of leadership? What is the role of schools in leadership development? A list of references and ERIC resources is included. (Author/DB)

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Leadership in Civic Education

by Robert B. Woyach

In recent years, social studies educators have given serious attention to the apparent crisis of citizenship and the improvement of civic education in the United States. Insufficient attention, however, has been given to the place of leadership in civic education. Yet, youth leadership development is big business in the United States. Each year, over half a million high school students, along with a smaller but growing number of middle school students, participate in programs intended to encourage civic leadership and to develop leadership skills.

How Is Leadership Related to Citizenship? Leadership is one of the most studied but least understood of all social phenomena (Bennis and Nanus 1985). Yet, for most people the concept of "leader" is not complex. It evokes images remarkably close to the Middle English origins of the term: a figure who holds a position of authority and directs the actions of others by force of personality, if not birthright. This image sets leaders apart. It encourages people to think about the role of leader as something distinct from, and partially in opposition to, the role of citizen.

Yet, this authority-based, charisma-driven image of the directive leader has questionable relevance to both the theory and practice of democracy. Decades of studies on leadership have failed to uncover any meaningful set of physical or personality traits that make a person a leader. Indeed, in group settings the vast majority of people aspire to a leadership role regardless of their personality or interpersonal styles. In the United States, groups usually reject the leadership of people with highly directive (authoritarian) styles. We may hold feudal images of "leaders," but in practice, we prefer leadership that is non-elitist, decentralized, and participatory.

Our practice of leadership has enormous implications for the relationship between leadership and citizenship. In democracies, leadership is best understood as a dimension of citizenship itself, distinctive only in that it involves special competencies. In general terms, leadership involves the structuring and initiating activities that citizens must perform if groups (publics) are to organize themselves, establish goals and priorities, make decisions, settle conflicts, and in general accomplish their goals.

What Are the Essential Elements of Leadership? Debates abound regarding the best ways to develop leadership competence. At the same time, there exists considerable agreement regarding the essential elements of leadership development when it is viewed as a long-term process (Christensen and Woyach 1990). These elements include conceptual, motivational, ethical, and skill components, and clearly cannot all be achieved in a week-long or even a year-long program.

- **Motivation: Awareness and Empowerment.** One of the most basic goals of leadership development is to motivate young people to take personal responsibility for exercising leadership. For many programs this involves developing an awareness of social need on the one hand and self-esteem on the other. Young people need opportunities to connect to issues that concern them. They must see how individuals exercise leadership in these areas. Finally, they must be encouraged to see themselves in these leadership roles—to give themselves permission to lead.
- **Understanding Leadership: Role and Authenticity.** One of the most persistent inhibitors of leadership may be our elitist and directive images of leaders. Leadership development programs, therefore, must create new images of leadership. Young people need to learn what it is that leaders do. They need to understand what it means to structure and initiate group activity. They need to learn how to do these things in ways that reinforce democratic norms.

  An important issue that has received increased attention in recent years is the ethical dimension of leadership. Many people who are attracted to positions of leadership are attracted primarily to the personal rewards. Democratic leaders, however, must learn to balance the interests of self, group, and other wider communities of which the group is a part. Only if these interests are balanced will the individual be able to exercise leadership in an effective and authentic way.
- **Experience with Leadership: Skills and Competencies.** Finally, leadership involves doing, not just thinking. Effective leadership requires interpersonal skills and competencies that must be learned through experience and practice and through the assessment of successes and failures. In the final analysis, young people can only learn the skills of leadership if they are allowed to exercise leadership in meaningful ways.

What Are the Competencies of Leadership? Groups and communities depend on leaders to help them establish goals and priorities, make decisions, settle conflicts, maintain commitment, and generally to accomplish the work of the group. A model of civic leadership developed at The Ohio State University's Mershon Center summarizes the leadership role in terms of eight leadership competencies (Woyach 1992).

- **Shaping Visions and Goals—Envisioning.** The foundation of any group or community is its sense of common purpose and identity—its vision. Bennis and Nanus (1985) identify envisioning—the shaping of visions and goals—as the most basic and important of the leadership competencies. Actually envisioning is a complex task that requires the ability to identify needs and opportunities, put a purpose or mission into words, derive concrete goals from that vision, and engage other people in the process of shaping these visions and goals so that they become committed to them.
- **Helping Groups Make Decisions—Consensus Seeking.** Like individuals, groups need to make decisions. How group decision-making is structured affects not only the

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quality of the decisions, but also the commitment of members. Typically the best way for small groups to make decisions is through consensus. Consensus decisions ensure the maximum use of the group's knowledge. They also promote the greatest group commitment, since everyone has a stake in the outcome. However, building consensus can be difficult, requiring real skill on the part of leaders.

- **Resolving Conflicts—Negotiation.** Not all decisions can be made through consensus. Conflicts over goals and priorities can paralyze a group, destroying group solidarity and member commitment. Yet conflict is unavoidable. Thus all groups need skillful negotiators. The ability to resolve conflicts so that all parties feel they have won something can keep a group, or a community, from tearing itself apart.
- **Motivating Members—Creating Rewards.** No one remains committed to a group for long simply because he believes in its goals. Member commitment needs to be rewarded to remain strong, even if that reward is little more than a sense of satisfaction for having done some good. Groups depend on leaders to make participation a rewarding experience—that is, to ensure that appropriate rewards go to members in appropriate ways and at appropriate times.
- **Laying the Foundation for Outside Support—Creating an Image.** To achieve their goals, most groups rely on other people and other groups to provide things like money, meeting space, and a variety of other resources. Attracting this support depends on having leaders who are effective at image creation—at getting the group recognized in the larger community. Image creation is a complex process that involves identifying images that capture the essence of the group and its vision, creatively communicating that image through various media, and even getting the attention of people who control access to media.
- **Laying the Foundation for Group Power—Gaining Legitimacy.** A critical part of any group's image is its credibility. Unless a group is seen as legitimate—as being credible and having the right to work toward its vision—the group will neither be able to influence others or attract the resources it needs. Looking after the group's legitimacy requires leaders who understand the different sources of legitimacy, who know what makes the group legitimate with particular people, and who are skillful at creating and protecting the group's legitimacy.
- **Attracting Outside Support and Defending the Group—Advocacy.** Once groups are known to outsiders or begin to work in the wider community, they inevitably meet with resistance. Some people will disagree with the group's goals, or challenge the group's right to work toward them. At that point the group needs skilled advocates. They need leaders who can persuade the doubtful and hold the critics at bay.
- **Getting Support from Other Groups—Coalition Building.** Most groups find they must work with other groups at one time or another. Making groups of groups, or coalitions, succeed represents a major leadership challenge. Coalitions need leaders who know how to pick the right coalition partners, and how to nurture the intergroup relationship. Finally, they must know how to get the most from the relationship without compromising their own group.

What Is the Role of Schools in Leadership Development?

Attention to leadership in the formal curriculum of American schools is rare. Those few courses on leadership that do exist typically serve a narrow group of student leaders. In general, leadership development within the United States is largely an extra-curricular or co-curricular enterprise.

Nonetheless, American schools can and do play a significant role in leadership development. Studies of adult leaders clearly indicate that youth leadership experiences in school-based clubs and organizations play a significant role in encouraging and preparing youth for leadership as adults (Cox 1988). Moreover, while curricular programs on leadership are rare, the classroom experiences communicate a wide array of messages about leadership. How leaders are portrayed in history courses influences students' understanding of the leadership role. The ways in which social issues are portrayed and the degree to which initiative is rewarded influence students' motivation to exercise leadership.

The role that schools have in providing opportunities for leadership development and in building students' image of leadership require schools to seriously consider how changes in schooling affect the development of the next generation of leaders. The decline of club programs in some schools, because of funding and scheduling problems, should be of concern to people interested in leadership development. On the other hand, trends toward site-based management offer intriguing new opportunities for involving students in the governance of the school community.

References and ERIC Resources

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED Number are in the ERIC system. They are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are 703-440-1440 and 800-443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), which is available in most large public or university libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below or ordered through Interlibrary Loan.

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